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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the dynamics of a successful college tutorial program should include the following components: well planned objectives, goals, and standards; enough capable staff; an inservice training program; adequate financing and space; efficient paper management procedures; and an effective means of evaluation including the willingness to use the feedback obtained from the program. (TS)

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Dynamics of a Successful Tutorial Program

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Introduction

The dynamics of any successful operation, including a college/university-level tutorial program, should include the following components: well planned objectives, goals and standards, enough capable staff, an in-service training program, adequate financing and space, efficient paper management procedures, and an effective means of evaluation--including the willingness to use feedback thus obtained.

Purposes, Objectives, Goals, Standards

A successful program does not just happen, it is made to happen by people who know what they are doing and why they are doing it; i.e., they have carefully planned in advance what should be done by whom, why, when, where and how (1:13). Major steps in planning include formulating policies, taking inventory of resources, formulating purposes, objectives, goals and performance standards, and developing an effective method of evaluation, including the use of feedback obtained (1:13-15; 5:221-230). Policies and

resources vary according to situation; however, the principle and practice of formulating purposes, etc., are mandatory for anyone seeking to run a dynamic tutorial program.

A purpose may be defined as "a broad statement of an aspiration" (1:13). A primary purpose for a tutorial services program is to provide students needing tutorial assistance with a qualified tutor (2:1). Of course, other purposes could be added, or certain policy limitations could be placed upon the type of student eligible for tutoring--e.g., free tutoring for all, or only for EOP/veteran/handicapped students, etc.

An objective is a more specific statement which, if achieved, will produce progress toward fulfilling a purpose (1:14). Two such objectives at California State University, Fresno are to "gain the confidence and cooperation of school deans and department chairpersons..." and to "provide adequate funding..." (2:1).

A goal is a still more specific statement designed to facilitate achievement of a stated objective. Three imperative goals are to interview each tutor applicant to assess his/her qualifications, to interview each tutee to assess his/her needs and to train and regularly consult with tutors. A fourth goal could deal with advertising.

Finally, a performance standard is "a measurement by which performance can be evaluated" (1:15). Essentially, a good job description clearly states performance standards (i.e., behavioral expectations). For example, a program director may have responsibility to "supervise advertising/communications pertaining to program offerings," "develop sources of revenue, staff and materiel" and "train tutors in the area of study skills and time management" (2:2).

Evaluation will be discussed in another section.

Staff Personnel

A successful tutorial program has at least three categories of staff: professionally trained coordinators (titles vary), qualified peer tutors and secretarial support. Preferably, at least one of the professionals should have a master's degree and experience in identifying learning and reading disabilities so as properly to assist or refer students with such difficulties. The rest should have at least the bachelor's degree with a year of related experience. Rather than be detracted by further specific requirements, however, we would prefer to focus on qualities and behaviors of professional staff--warmth, friendliness, willingness to listen, ability to relate to a variety of cultures and socio-economic strata, ability to identify the problem; i.e., effective counseling-type behaviors similar to those described by Carkuff (3).

Tutees often are able to relate more effectively to qualified peers than to their instructors, especially older and more prestigious faculty. (Quite often the instructor-in-question really desires to help--but we are dealing with the phenomenon of student perception; i.e., the realm of the student's view of reality, however faulty.) Ideally, tutors will have represented in their ranks a sexual and racial balance for sake of equity. (We do not hold to the thinking that only women can tutor women and minorities tutor minorities.) Occasionally, however, the most effective tutor-tutee pairing will be on the bases of sex and/or ethnicity, but more for sake of meeting the tutee's personal-social needs.

Ideally, qualified tutors in a given discipline should be recommended by a faculty member who knows how well the applicant understands the content. Also, we suggest tutors have at least a "B" average in the discipline and 2.75 overall GPA (out of 4.00). These criteria should demonstrate to the

faculty (and student body) that the tutorial service has reasonably high standards and is operating in cooperation with them, rather than as an isolated, independent agency. We have found, too, that the program gains respect and credibility with the faculty when the director spends time communicating personally with the academic vice-president, school deans and department chairpersons about the program, and offers evaluative data regarding the program's effectiveness; i.e., good "PR" (public relations) also facilitates program effectiveness.

Personal characteristics of tutors should include warmth, friendliness and desire to help, as well as promptness, preparedness, ability to communicate content and spot problems. The tutor should discuss some problems, such as emotional or financial, with one of the professional staff regarding appropriate referral to another campus service. However, other problems can and should be handled directly by the tutor, especially basic study skills and time management. These skills would be discussed during in-service training sessions. Finally, a tutor needs to maintain regular contact with the professional staff for purposes of communication and feedback.

Initial contacts with people are very important, often setting a positive tone or negative impression of a given service agency; therefore, it is crucial that secretarial staff be able to greet people warmly and use proper telephone etiquette. Secretarial staff are important team members and should be treated and trained accordingly.

In-Service Training

Suffice it to say, a program director or any staff member cannot rest on past training and accomplishments. Each one should be involved in some kind of a professional renewing program. Individual reading of appropriate

literature and attending professional meetings such as the WCRA annual conference are important; however, planned group activities are also necessary, such as "hands-on" experiencing of new ways of doing old things. In-service training is necessary for every staff member--professional, peer tutor and secretarial.

Paper Management

Efficiency enhances effectiveness--to a limit, of course. Forms for application, recommendation, hours tutored, money spent, evaluation, etc., are necessary. Poorly devised forms can aggravate and intimidate students, and can deter a program's success. Inadequate or incomplete record keeping prevents or, at best, hinders full program evaluation. One should aim for attractive, color-coded, concise forms and complete--but not onerous--record keeping.

Money

Few programs seem to have too much money; many seem to struggle with too little. Limited funds should cause the management to consolidate, cut costs, find creative ways of achieving goals and objectives and, above all, really distinguish between primary and secondary priorities--necessary elements in the "good, prior planning" process.

One primary principle to heed is: "avoid a patch-work budget;" i.e., strive to have your own line-item budget, not one comprised of funds "donated" by several sources, each of which currently seems to be becoming progressively smaller and tighter.

Space and Location

Ideally, a successful program should have its own space for individual

and small group tutoring for purposes of control and accessibility; however, such is not always the case. Then, it becomes necessary to trust tutors to use good judgment in choosing appropriate locations (part of the selection and in-service training processes). Of course, it is necessary for professional staff to have their own private office space to function properly. The same holds true for clerical staff, too.

Accessibility to the tutorial service is also important. Location near major student traffic flow enhances student utilization of the service.

Evaluation

Effective evaluation is crucial to the success and dynamic of any program. (Attempting to evaluate program effectiveness implies, of course, that we know what our goals and objectives are; i.e., we know what we are trying to do). A basic premise regarding evaluation is that one really must be willing to look honestly both at oneself and at the total program, and then be willing both to face up to negative feedback and to act constructively upon it. Evaluation should be done periodically--e.g., monthly, at end of semester/term, annually, etc. Data may be obtained by personal interview and questionnaire, as well as comparing grades earned to hours tutored. Staff performance and office procedures--all phases of the operation--need to be scrutinized. Then, the system must be modified accordingly based upon feedback (5:221-30). Keep in mind the addage: "Some people are doing things very well which they shouldn't be doing at all." Often, a procedure or function once vital is no longer necessary. But the question is: are we willing to evaluate and change, if necessary, out-moded but comfortable ways of doing things?

An important source of regular, immediate feedback is found in staff meetings in which all team members are able to freely and openly discuss all aspects of the program.

Conclusion

These, then, are important components in a dynamic, successful tutorial program: comprehensive planning of purposes, goals, objectives and standards, enough capable staff, an in-service training program, adequate funding and space, efficient office procedures, and an effective means of evaluation. Although this list may not be comprehensive, no item discussed is extraneous.

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